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Mengele drug-ring link disclosed in '71

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New York Times News Service

The CIA began receiving reports in 1971 that Nazi war criminal Josef Mengele was heavily involved with partners in illegal narcotics trafficking in Paraguay, according to declassified government documents.

The documents, provided in censored form by the CIA for a Senate inquiry, indicate agency officials in Paraguay gave credence to the reports and forwarded them to headquarters in Washington, which queried other federal investigative agencies on the matter as recently as 1979.

The documents do not establish the truth of the reports, and they leave many questions unanswered about Mengele, who was chief doctor at the Auschwitz concentration camp, where millions died. Among the questions are to what extent the information was pursued in the search for one of Nazi Germany's most notorious fugitives.

"They just let the information hang there," said Sen. Alfonse D'Amato [R., N.Y.]. "No one pursued this." D'Amato obtained the documents in conjunction with Sen. Arlen Specter [R., Pa.].

A spokesman for the CIA in Washington said the information about Mengele was disseminated "as appropriate" to other government agencies, including the State, Defense and Treasury Depart-

ments and the Customs Service.

The spokesman could not discuss whether the information was forwarded to other governments, such as West Germany, which has an outstanding warrant for Mengele's arrest.

The documents, which were obtained by the New York Times, offer these new accounts, among others:

- The CIA's Strategic Narcotics Team approached other federal agencies in 1979 for further information on reports of drug-trafficking by Mengele, seeking to back up an article the team had submitted for publication in the International Narcotics Review. The article later was withdrawn and could not be immediately located by the agency, according to D'Amato and Specter.

- A 1974 CIA debriefing of a source who interviewed Nazis in Paraguay produced information that Mengele had undergone plastic surgery and appeared to be much younger than his age, 62 at that time. The source also reported that a photograph in Paraguayan passport files showed Mengele after the plastic surgery.

- The same source also reported an account that Mengele, around 1968, was living in Paraguay with Martin Bormann, Hitler's designated successor, who is believed by most authorities to have died in 1945 in Berlin.